

Understanding Organizational Culture for Effective Knowledge Sharing Behaviors in the Workplace

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Abstract: Many organizations put knowledge management (KM) systems into place but fail to use these systems effectively. A common mistake is to ignore common elements that contribute to the success of knowledge sharing, such as organizational culture. Another reason is that organizations do not pay attention to one of the main component of KM which is knowledge sharing. Thus, the objective of this conceptual paper is to explore the impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing behavior. This paper examines several different cultural dimensions that were initially introduced by Geert Hofstede's et al., (1990). Years later, in 2010, Hofstede collaborated with an economist--Bob Waisfisz to further explore organizational cultural dimensions in which we find the dimensions can offer theoretical insights to knowledge sharing behaviors among employees in organizations. Each of these dimensional dichotomies has the potential to affect knowledge sharing and KM in different organizational environments. This paper uses the literature review to suggest the organizational cultures that best facilitate knowledge sharing.

Keywords: Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Management, Organizational Culture, Knowledge Sharing Enablers, Collaboration Behavior, Information Technology, Hofstede, Organizational Culture Dimensions

Introduction

In today's work environment, organizations have become more aware of the advantages that knowledge sharing can bring to a firm. Many companies have invested substantial time and money into knowledge management systems, hoping to improve their knowledge sharing procedures and subsequently increase their competitiveness. Unfortunately, as noted by International Data Corp. (IDC), a market intelligence and advisory firm in the IT and telecommunications industries, at least US\$31.5 billion is lost annually by Fortune 500 companies because of failure to share knowledge (Babcock, 2004). Knowledge management can be implemented effectively in several ways. The optimal way to implement knowledge sharing for a given organization depends on the organizational context of the firm, and many managers misunderstand this context (Carter & Scarbrough, 2001; Voelpel, Dous & Davenport, 2005). Some researchers have also noted that KM can fail due to insufficient implementation time (Guptara, 1999), lack of managerial ability (Bantel & Jackson, 1989), lack of KM awareness (Singh, 2011), and organizational culture (Storey & Barnett, 2000). Damodaran and Olphert (2000) pointed out that organizational culture – specifically knowledge-sharing culture – is the most important consideration for effective KM. Magnier-Watanabe and Senoo (2010) pointed out that organizational culture plays a crucial role in the different knowledge sharing activities. As a result, organizations with a positive organizational culture are more likely to be successful in KM implementation than organizations without.

Bollinger and Smith (2001) pointed out that KM involves organizational culture, teamwork, and learning and sharing skills, experience and knowledge. According to Schein (1986), culture mediates behavior by setting the norms for behavior, values and beliefs. Therefore, organizational culture may contribute to the success or failure of KM (Schein, 1986). This literature review will focus on the impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing behavior. However, because there is a large body of literature on this general topic, we have chosen to examine knowledge sharing through the lens of Hofstede's (2010) cultural dimensions, as applied to organizations. Hofstede and his colleagues established specific dimensions of

organizational culture, which we refer to as dichotomies. These dimensions are: means-oriented vs. goal-oriented, work-oriented vs. employee-oriented, closed system vs. open system, local vs. professional, internally driven vs. externally driven and easy-going work discipline vs. strict work discipline. In this research we present a number of propositions regarding each organizational culture dimension and its relation to knowledge sharing.

Knowledge Management

Knowledge or intellectual capital is considered to be one of the major sources of production and value in organizations. Thus, implementing knowledge management (KM) successfully allows organizations to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage by continuously developing knowledge resources and assets (Xue & Zhang, 2010). Researchers have commonly defined explicit knowledge as information that is based on hard data which is capable of being articulated using a systematic language which could be codified in different forms, such as manuals or computer files (Lee, 2001; Guan-Lin et al., 2011). Dixon (2000) added that explicit knowledge consists of what we observe and therefore is easier to understand and transfer. In contrast, implicit knowledge is defined as socially embedded knowledge that is largely acquired through direct experience and observation (Dixon, 2000). This type of knowledge is not easily exchanged through written or spoken language (Reychav & Weisberg, 2010; Lee, 2001, Guan-Lin et al., 2011). As a result, there are no formal systems and processes that can be used to assure that implicit knowledge is shared.

Although explicit and implicit knowledge are very different, both types of knowledge are needed in a knowledge management system. Knowledge management (KM) refers to the general process of creating and organizing information for a company or institution (Al-Adaileh & Al-Atawi, 2011; Gurteen, 1998; Cooper, 2006). To expand upon this, Guptill (2005) stated that KM, as a contemporary business philosophy, grew out of three basic trends. First, the Internet's ubiquitous presence makes data readily available all the time, but in order to capitalize on this excess of information, it needs to be processed. Second, the globalization of business has created an environment wherein production can occur anywhere in the world; as a result, the true source of competitive advantage comes from the knowledge of how to make products "better, cheaper, and faster." Finally, the growing complexity of modern business requires new business processes to deliver "the right information at the right time" in order to ensure accountability and reduce the risk of mistakes" (Guptill, 2005). O'Dell and Grayson (1998) defined KM as, "a conscious strategy of getting the right knowledge to the right people at the right time and helping people share and put information into action in ways that strive to improve organizational performance." Thus, in many ways KM is an interactive process, wherein there is a free interchange of concepts aimed at improving or creating new organizational competencies that then contribute to improving organizational performance.

Knowledge Sharing Behavior

Knowledge sharing and transfer of knowledge are crucial components in the KM process without which KM cannot be successful (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002; Ronen & Pasher, 2010). Thus it is vital that employees share their personal insights and knowledge with their co-workers. Lee (2001) referred to knowledge sharing as "activities of transferring or disseminating knowledge from one person, group or organization to another." Ver der Hoff and De Ridder (2004) defined knowledge sharing as "the process where individuals mutually exchange their (implicit and explicit) knowledge and jointly create new knowledge." Bartol and Srivastava (2002) defined knowledge sharing as "individuals sharing relevant information, ideas, suggestions, and expertise with one another." As this shows, definitions of knowledge sharing are relatively consistent. Scholars generally agree that knowledge sharing behavior is interactive, involving the free exchange of information among employees for the overall benefit of the organization in terms of

organizational goals and improving services. The scholars cited above all advocate for the free exchange of ideas as a critical component of the definition of knowledge sharing behavior.

Empowerment of Knowledge Sharing

Empowerment has been recognized in the literature as important in management and business for many reasons. For example, if employees are empowered via organizational support for knowledge sharing, this enhances overall managerial and organizational effectiveness (Keller & Dansereau, 1995). Ergeneli et al., (2007) also stress that empowerment is a supportive factor that responds to environmental changes at the right time. Researchers have identified two theoretical frameworks through which to usefully view empowerment; the first is based on relationships between employees and their managers, while the second is based on employee perception. The first approach suggests that employees are empowered by management directly giving them power, control and authority. In contrast, the second approach suggests that employees are empowered through the alteration of their own perception. For example, if employees recognize themselves as being empowered when they feel supported by their management in terms of making decisions when needed (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990; Spreitzer, 1995).

A third theoretical framework put forth by Robbins et al. (2002), suggests that the interaction between environment, personal perception, and attitudes combined with the way these elements affect employee's work behavior is what establishes empowerment. According to Joa and Shimb (2012), organizational culture has an impact on psychological empowerment. Therefore, in this review we will further examine the relationship between organizational culture and employee empowerment regarding the act of sharing their knowledge with their colleagues.

Literature Review

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is the unseen hand in organizations and is a critical component in achieving sustainable success, along with other factors such as infrastructure, technology and measurement (O'Dell & Grayson, 1998). O'Dell and Grayson (1998) defined organizational culture as "the combination of shared history, expectations, unwritten rules, and social mores that affects the behavior of everyone, from managers to mailroom clerks." Schneider et al. (1996) pointed out that organizational culture happens as a result of the feelings of employees combined with policies, practices and procedures as well as a group of abstract aspects such as what is to be believed, valued and worshipped. Thus, different scholars have defined organizational culture similarly and consistently.

Organizational culture plays a vital role as enabler in promoting knowledge sharing norms and learning motivations among members of an organization (Hansen, Nohria & Tieney, 1999). Additionally, organizational culture plays a crucial role in the integration of people, relationships and technology to improve knowledge management processes (Hansen, Nohria & Tieney, 1999). For instance, an organizational culture that facilitates trust between employees and their managers will positively influence knowledge sharing (Su & Chow, 2010). Organizations that perform well at adopting knowledge sharing behaviors are likely to more successfully implement knowledge management practices than organizations that do not.

Organizational culture is becoming the most frequently cited enabler of knowledge sharing, according to McDermott and O'Dell (2001) and Goh (2002). KM requires a culture that encourages employees to create, capture, leverage and share knowledge, thus enabling them to advance the performance of an organization. This conclusion was supported by Ruggles (1998), who investigated 431 US and European organizations to identify the essential enablers and barriers to knowledge sharing in organizations. Ruggles found that organizational culture is the most important factor, while the second most important factor is organizational structure.

A study conducted by De Long and Fahey (2004) recognized different types of culture that positively influence the central KM activities of knowledge creation, sharing and use. The first is the learning culture, which encourages knowledge sharing. The second and the third are the cooperative and collaborative cultures, both of which involve working with others and therefore promote knowledge sharing.

However, not all studies have reported a significant relationship between knowledge sharing and organizational culture as there were few studies that found organizational culture did not impose any influence on knowledge sharing (Rad et al., 2011; Yang & Chen, 2007). Yang and Chen (2007) suggested three possible reasons for their results. First, organizational culture is notoriously difficult to measure because it is a social construct. Second, social interactions may have confounded the results. Third, culture can cover a wide range of concepts and therefore some unmeasured cultural factors might influence knowledge sharing, such as national culture. Therefore, these results could potentially represent a false negative, or a failure to find significant results. These conflicting or ambiguous results indicate a need for further research into the influence of different cultures on knowledge sharing.

Another gap in the literature is that many studies of knowledge sharing and organizational culture were conducted in either Western and Eastern cultures (Ardichvili et al., 2006; Arling & Chun, 2011; Burns et al., 2011; Hauschild et al., 2001; Huysam & Wulf; 2006; Vries, et al., 2006; Yang & Chen, 2007). Very few studies have been done in the Middle East, such as the study by Al-Adaileh and Al-Atawi (2011) which discussed organizational culture's impact on knowledge exchange in the context of a Saudi telecom company. In addition, there are other studies that address knowledge sharing in the United of Arab Emirates such as from Ahmad and Daghfous (2010), Behery (2008), Seba et al. (2012) and Seba et al., (2012), but their focus was not based on the effect of organizational culture on knowledge sharing behaviour. Instead they have looked at other aspects such as information technology, organizational structure, and leadership. Therefore, more studies are needed to investigate the impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing within a Middle Eastern culture.

Organizational Culture Dimensions

Scholars have identified many dimensions of organizational culture in their efforts to make organizational culture a measurable construct. For example, Bock et al. (2005) highlighted three dimensions: (1) fairness, (2) affiliation, and (3) innovativeness. Everd and Gert (2011) identified seven organizational culture dimensions which may shape the knowledge sharing behavior of employees; these are conflict resolution, disposition towards change, employee participation, goal clarity, locus of authority, management style and reward orientation. Some researchers have difficulty differentiating national culture dimensions (Hofstede, 1980) from organizational culture dimensions (Hofstede et al., 1990; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). For example, the study by Tong et al. (2013) actually measured organizational culture based on national culture dimensions. This paper focuses on six organizational culture dimensions: (1) process- vs.. results-oriented, (2) job- vs.. employee-oriented, (3) professional vs.. parochial, (4) closed vs.. open, (5) tightly controlled vs.. loose, and (6) pragmatic vs.. normative (Hofstede, 1990; Hansen, 2003). In 2010, Hofstede collaborated with economist Bob Waisfisz to further explore organizational cultural dimension; based on their findings they renamed some of the abovementioned dimensions and added two semi-autonomous dimensions, degree of acceptance of leadership style and degree of identification with one's organization (Hofstede et al., 1990; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). The autonomous dimensions are independent while the semi-autonomous dimensions rely on one another in explaining the culture of organizations (Hofstede Center, 2013). Therefore, this review of literature is based on Hofstede's organizational culture dimensions as defined after his collaboration with Waisfisz (2010). The next section explains

each of the organizational culture dimensions and their relationship to knowledge sharing behavior.

Effects of Organizational Culture Dimensions on Knowledge Sharing Behavior

This section explores the effect of organizational culture dimensions on knowledge sharing behavior. Each of the organizational culture dimensions--i.e. whether it promotes or hinders knowledge sharing, is discussed as shown in Figure 1. At the end of each of the cultural dimensions section, we present our propositions for that dimension.

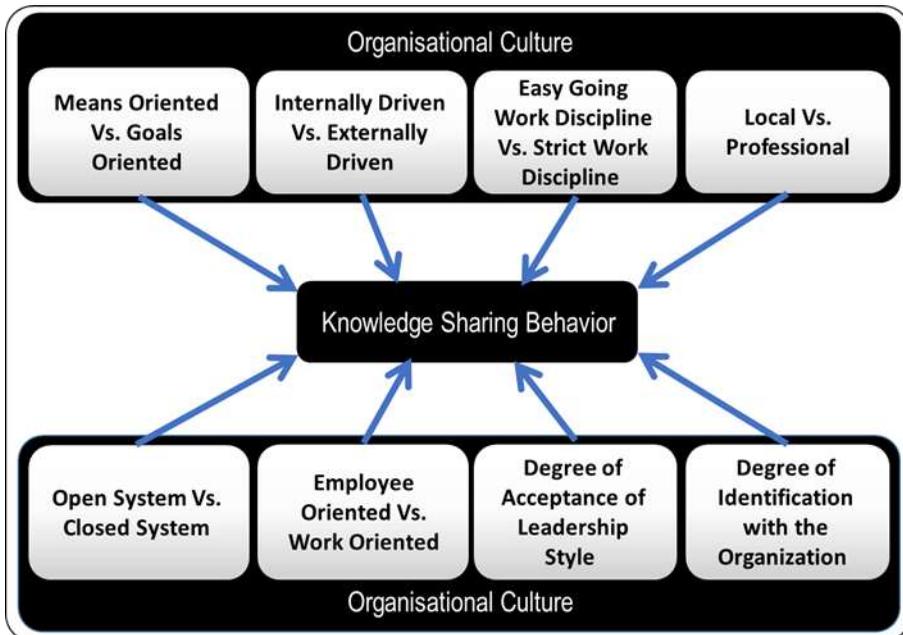


Figure 1: A Culturally-Oriented Framework for Understanding Knowledge Sharing Behaviors

Means-Oriented vs. Goal-Oriented

This dimension, one of the six autonomous dimensions, is linked with organizational effectiveness. In a means-oriented culture, people are more concerned about how the work should be carried out; they focus on the process of the work rather than the outcome. In this type of culture people avoid taking risks and expand a limited effort in their jobs; their work life is routine (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, & Waisfisz, 2010). The employees in this type of organizational culture are guided by the management and want to have a complete picture of how to operate and work (Lin & Joe, 2012). They feel anxious and uncertain if they do not have a clear understanding of the task process.

According to Hofstede and Waisfisz (2010), they avoid risk taking in performing their tasks and follow a routine structure in their work (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). In light of this, with respect to knowledge sharing behavior, we propose that employees in a means-oriented culture will avoid sharing knowledge for two reasons. First, if knowledge sharing is not part of their task process, they have no motivation to integrate it into their daily routine. Since employees do not think about the ultimate outcome, they are unaware that knowledge sharing can improve the overall competitive advantage of the firm. Second, some researchers consider knowledge sharing as risk, and employees in a means-oriented culture routinely avoid

risk-taking (Lai & Lee, 2007). Therefore, the knowledge sharing process can be hindered in this type of organizational culture until the work flow and process was clearly communicated to the employees. Likewise, the more the work process involve knowledge sharing activities, the more the employees are expected to share their knowledge more effectively. Hence we propose:

Proposition 1: A means-oriented culture that consists of clear work processes will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 2: A means-oriented culture that consists of unclear work processes will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

In contrast, employees in a goal-oriented culture pay attention to what should be achieved and are willing to take risks, as long as those risks are in line with their goals. They will do what it takes to complete a task with minimum or no direction (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). Therefore, we propose that employees in this culture would be more willing to share their knowledge, as long as it will help them achieve their immediate tasks and/or ultimate goals. However, they may avoid sharing their knowledge if they are unsure of the consequences. Therefore, the propositions for this dimension are as follows:

Proposition 3: A goal-oriented culture that consists of clear work outcomes will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 4: A goal-oriented culture that consists of unclear work outcomes will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Internally Driven vs. Externally Driven

In an internally driven culture, employees pay a lot of attention to business ethics and honesty, they distinguish their tasks to business environment, and they know what is good for the customers (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). Following the guidance of this model, especially in today's highly dynamic business environment, such an organization will be more interested in adhering to their values and business ethics than following the changing interests of customers. Failing to balance customers' interests and needs with business values and ethics may interfere with the organization's knowledge development and sharing capacity, as considerable time must be spent evaluating different organizational choices on the basis of ethical considerations. As a result, the organization is likely to waste time exploring the value expectations of different customer groups instead of focusing on the areas that could be improved to increase their competitive edge (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv & Sanders, 1990). In the continually changing business world, the focus of the organization should be directed towards the creation and sourcing of useful knowledge – whether from outside or inside the organization – regardless of the ethical aspect of the dealings that result from the application of that knowledge. Further, for an organization that seeks to develop an established knowledge base and a good knowledge sharing profile, the company will need more practical with the outside. Basically, the organization may spend excessive amounts of time in checking honesty and ethical compliance, which do not affect knowledge sharing either directly or indirectly. Such an organization might also have the view that, based on honesty and the regard for honesty, they should have only as much information as the outside environment and their customers expect and need from them (Hofstede, 2011). The worldview of such an organization would be severely limited, unless changes in the economic environment are practical. Further, strict adherence to ethical standards will mean that the organization is expected to deal with its customers and communities on a highly personal basis. Therefore, an internally driven culture will neither foster nor impair the

development of knowledge or the sharing of knowledge, although it may reduce the time available for these useful practices. Thus we propose:

Proposition 5: In an internally driven culture with an extreme ethical outlook and less practical, this will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

In contrast, an externally driven culture focuses on customer satisfaction and customer requirements. They value results and demonstrate more of a pragmatic view, rather than an ethical one (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). In essence, this means that an organization that adopts this culture will have enough time to invest in the development of knowledge, as well developing knowledge sharing abilities among its members. For example, one good source of new knowledge would be keenly watching the moves and the innovations of competitors to gain knowledge of their underlying strategies (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv & Sanders, 1990). After capturing the underlying concepts, which is particularly practical, the organization will be able to develop the information knowledge collected and then apply the same in staging their marketplace and customer outlook.

For example, if the organization wishes to meet the needs of its customers in the current continually-changing business and competitive environment, the organization must be able to employ hybrid strategies to address these changing demands. Also, organization need to develop knowledge sharing strategies among employees in the organization (Tripathi & Tripathi, 2009). Hybrid strategies are important because the combination of different strategies will enhance the performance and overall competitive advantage of the organization – i.e. a company may choose to implement both a cost leadership and differentiation strategy simultaneously (Baroto et al., 2012).

Through these moves, an organization with an externally driven culture will be able to collect information from its competitors and then apply it to develop a strategy that incorporates this information into its varied knowledge base. Therefore, an externally driven culture does not necessarily enhance knowledge sharing, but it does improve the flexibility of an organization and its employees in collecting information that helps it meet its customers' needs. Such an organization will also improve the amount and range of knowledge held, as well as boosting its knowledge development and sharing potential. This culture therefore, holds that results are the most important consideration in business; therefore a pragmatic attitude guides the business and its dealings as opposed to being guided by ethics (Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). Such an organization has a focus on developing and sharing whatever information is available that is relevant to meeting the needs of its customers. For instance, by reducing the ethical outlook and make it more practical, the organization is able to focus all its resources on the development of knowledge and the sourcing of information relevant to its business area, including customer service and the changes taking place in the market. Further, a pragmatic view will increase the company's focus on employee development in the area of meeting customer needs. As a result, the time and the resources of the business will be directed towards knowledge development, which will consequently improve the knowledge base held, which can then be shared amongst the organization's members. Hence, we suggest the following proposition:

Proposition 6: In an externally driven culture with less ethical outlook and more practical, this will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Easy-going Work Discipline vs. Strict Work Discipline:

An easy-going culture encourages creativity because it has a very loose internal organizational structure, where predictability is minimal and not anticipated (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). Such a culture allows the employees high flexibility to take on tasks that may not be within their area of regular work. Furthermore, it implies that the organization does not

demand too much routine in the way employees complete their tasks, allowing them to experiment and employ easier or faster approaches as they see fit (Almahamid et al., 2010). Shaw and Edwards (2005) explained that collaborative work is likely to be encouraged in a cultural environment that does not restrict the association of workers in the organization. A shared vision is likely to be fostered in an organizational culture that encourages loose control of workers, since all workers regardless of department or group will be acculturated to assimilate the shared goals as their own (Lopez, Peon & Ordas, 2004). In addition, in such a culture the organization does not control the work behavior of its employees to the level that it limits their innovativeness, leaving them free to explore new ways of doing their work, which may yield better results.

Rivera-Vazquez et al. (2009) conducted a study to explore the barriers that hinder knowledge sharing and innovation and pointed out several factors that are likely to influence knowledge sharing at the employee level. These include emotional intelligence, organizational environment and the commitment of managers (Fey & Furu 2008). Given the characteristics of easy-going vs. strict work cultures, an easy-going culture is likely to offer a more favorable environment for the development of emotional intelligence. This mainly due to its loose internal structure, which is likely to promote the development of better emotional intelligence through the possibility of receiving on-the-job support from different members of the organization (Bock et al., 2005). An easy-going culture is also likely to foster the development of an environment that favors knowledge sharing.

In addition, the fact that an easy-going organizational culture exerts less control over its employees encourages the development of utility-guided relationships in the workplace. Since an easy going work discipline does not require organizations to have a tight internal structure, this implies that it will encourage cooperative working relationships between members of the organization, whether at the same or different levels of the organization (Bjorkman et al., 2004). As a result, knowledge sharing among employees will be fostered and knowledge sharing skills embedded in employees' behavior patterns (Fock et al., 2012). This light control of employees also allows them more flexibility and time to think innovatively, which may result in better ways of knowledge sharing and knowledge development (Bhirud et al., 2005). Al-adaileh (2011) points out that encouraging improvisation helps create an environment that fosters the recognition of new ideas and cultivates creativity among employees, which may help them devise new models of knowledge sharing; it also allows the employees the time and flexibility to create knowledge as well as share knowledge with those outside the organization. Hence we suggest:

Proposition 7: A very easy-going culture, where there is an encouragement for creativity and loose structure, will positively affect knowledge sharing.

On the other hand, in a culture of strict work discipline employees are very cost-conscious, punctual and serious as it is characterized by a very tightly binding internal structure (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). As a result, an organization guided by a strict work discipline culture is likely to limit the flexibility of workers, especially in terms of exploring, offering help or trying work that does not fall within their job description. In addition, the inflexibility of the culture limits the interaction between workers from different levels, and therefore they may not develop the initiative to pursue the organizational goals (Ardichvili et al., 2006). A strict work discipline exercises a high level of control on employees and discipline standards are very high (Almahamid et al., 2010). Due to the high levels of employee control, the innovativeness of employees is suppressed, the need to develop new knowledge or ideas is discouraged, and the schedules of the employees are strictly defined. Due to the high regard given to discipline, improvisation may be sacrificed in order to maintain expected disciplinary standards. In such an organization, improvisation levels are very low. Thus, flexibility and changes in the established ways of completing tasks are discouraged (Hofstede, 2011).

As a result of these characteristics, the creativity of workers is greatly suppressed, which limits their capacity to develop new knowledge (Almahamid et al., 2010). Bhirud, Rodrigues, and Desai (2005) found that the most important factor in the successful development of a knowledge sharing culture is managerial practices. Strict managerial practices are likely to discourage the adoption of knowledge sharing behavior, especially when employees are compelled to follow them precisely. Knowledge sharing is a person-centered initiative (Bock et al., 2005). Therefore, strict or excessively controlling managerial practices are likely to slow the adoption of knowledge sharing behavior while friendlier, more relaxed ones can increase the pace of adoption. Wang and Noe (2010) argued that knowledge sharing and the associated tools that an organization adopts are likely to be those that are in line with the established practices of the organization. For instance, an organization that limits the use of e-mail in the workplace is likely to impair knowledge sharing through e-mail (Argote, 1999). Therefore, we propose:

Proposition 8: A very strict work discipline, where there are tighter controls, will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Local vs. Professional:

In a very local culture, employees identify closely with their managers and/or the unit in which they work. Employees in this type of culture are given short-term directions, and have a social belief that they should be like everyone else (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). In essence, this implies that workers operating within such an organization will rely on meeting the directives of their superiors or the standards set for their particular piece of work (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv & Sanders 1990). As a result, these workers will rely on the instructions they are given and will not exercise their power of choice or borrow from any areas of job competence learned from other places. In such an organization, employees concentrate on the realization of short-term goals and focus more on the internal affairs of the organization (Hofstede, 2011). Therefore, in this culture we assume that employees will share their knowledge only as long as they have specific orders from their direct manager to do so. Without such direct orders, we would not expect employees to share their knowledge. Thus, we suggest:

Proposition 9: In a local culture where employees are obligated by management and are working on short-term objectives, this will affect negatively on knowledge sharing.

An organization guided by a professional culture, on the other hand, encourages the development of the individual. In a professional culture employees are identified by the work they do and are directed in a long-term basis (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). Therefore, we assume that a professional culture promotes knowledge sharing, as the focus of employees is on long term goals and a wider environment as opposed to the immediate environment and goals. This encourages brainstorming and exploration of new areas. At such an organization, employees identify with their respective professions, the contents and the contexts of their job (Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv & Sanders, 1990). Therefore, we assume that a professional culture encourages knowledge sharing by expanding the outlook of employees to the wider arena of their profession or job, as opposed to focusing on their immediate boss or piece of work. Since a professional culture allows employees to exercise special areas of competency rather than limiting them to what others have done, such a culture would encourage knowledge sharing. Therefore the following proposition is presented:

Proposition 10: In a professional culture where development of individual is encouraged and are working on long-term objectives, this will affect positively on knowledge sharing.

Open System vs. Closed System:

In an open system culture new employees are welcomed and employees believe that anyone can join the organization (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). The organization thus offers high accessibility, from both within and outside. In an open system culture the flow of information is easy which encourages internal and external communication (Cabrera et al., 2001). Such a system makes it easy to import new skills, technologies and organizational practices, which expand the knowledge base of the organization. Because communication between old employees and new employees is strongly supported, we suggest that employees in an open system culture are willing to share their knowledge. According to Fazli and Alishahi (2012), an open organizational system would also allow for more effective communication of organizational problems. Thus, an open system culture recognizes the role of informal groups, and other variety of supportive communication channels which promote the development and sharing of knowledge in ways that may not be possible in a more formal environment (Gebert & Boerner, 1999). As a result, the management of an organization that seeks to capture the full potential of its employees should encourage the formation of informal groups that bring workers together to pursue common interests as well as share useful knowledge (Al-Alawi, Al-Marzooqi & Mohammed, 2007, pp. 41-42). Scott-Findlay and Estabrooks (2007) propose that the strategies employed in managing these informal groups could be transferred to the management of more formal groups in the workplace.

Through knowledge exchange, employees contribute to the knowledge base held by the management of the organization. Through interaction in informal environments, organizations can merge the knowledge of different employees, and from this synthesis new knowledge related to organizational development can be generated (Endres, Endres, Chowdhury & Alam, 2007). Through an open organizational setup, different levels of workers are also much more likely to share ideas and information of importance to organizational development. Thus we propose the following:

Proposition 11: An open system culture in which new employees are welcomed and communication platforms are open will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 12: An open system culture in which informal groups are encouraged will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 13: An open system culture that captures the knowledge of new entrants will positively affects knowledge sharing.

Proposition 14: An open system culture that receives and shares knowledge with internal and external parties will positively affects knowledge sharing.

Proposition 15: An open system that acknowledges the input of different individuals with different characteristics will positively affect knowledge sharing.

In contrast, in a closed culture newcomers are not welcome and it is very difficult for them assimilate. Employees in this type of culture are usually closed and reserved with both insiders and outsiders (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). Because the focus of the closed system is largely internal, the external environment – which includes the factors and forces beyond the organization and its members – is seen as predictable and stable, and the basic assumption in a closed system culture is that the knowledge held among its members is enough to warrant an efficient performance. As a result, an organization with a closed system will not embrace knowledge held by newcomers, whether individuals or groups, because they are considered to be outsiders (Gebert & Boerner 1999, p. 341). Therefore, such an organization will

limit the exchange and the sharing of information in the workplace (Sahoo & Das 2011). Logically, closed cultures tend to be more secretive (Cabrera et al., 2001). The implication for such an organizational culture, especially in the long-term, is that the skills and the expertise of one employee will not be shared with others who are less experienced. At higher levels of the organization, such as the group or department, workers in different groups and at different functional levels will interact only minimally (Lai & Lee, 2007). In such a case, any competencies developed by one group will not be available to other groups. This impairs the exchange of vital managerial skills, among other things (Fazli & Alishahi, 2012).

According to Gebert and Boerner (1999, p. 344) another characteristic of the closed organizational system that discourages knowledge sharing is that workers are assigned a passive role in the execution of their work. Execution of duties is highly standardized and does not allow the worker to experiment or employ alternative measures that could help them improve or perfect their work style or approach. Furthermore, jobs are designed in such a way that the worker cannot realize his or her full potential, and the organization does not allow workers to engage in other lines of work, which may be more suited to them (Lai & Lee, 2007). The limitation of a closed culture is that limits the sharing of knowledge— for instance managerial tactics – between employees at different levels of the organization. For example, a manager will be limited to performing tasks explicitly assigned to his managerial position, and may not be allowed to acquire skills pertaining to a more subordinate or senior position.

Another limitation of a closed organizational system that discourages knowledge-sharing is that it expects workers to operate in a predictable, machine-like manner. The exchange of ideas among workers during the execution of tasks, which normally acts as a vital catalyst for innovation, is thus severely limited (Lee & Lai 2007); this works against the continual development of new information, which in turn limits the knowledge available to be shared at the workplace (Lai & Lee 2007).

For all the reasons mentioned above, a closed system culture is likely to hinder knowledge sharing among employees in organizations. We propose the following:

Proposition 16: A closed system culture that distances newcomers from the organization will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 17: A closed system culture that only conducts formal meetings and eliminates informal communication channels will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 18: A closed system culture that limits the inflow of knowledge from new entrants will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 19: A closed system culture that limits the reception and sharing of knowledge with both internal and external parties will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 20: A closed system culture that discourages knowledge sharing by disregarding the input of insiders and outsiders will negatively affects knowledge sharing.

Employee-oriented vs. Work-oriented:

In an organization with an employee-oriented culture, the managerial outlook will be one of care and concern for the employees, while the employees feel that the organization cares about them and will help them resolve personal problems, even at the organization's expense (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). The care shown for employees demonstrates to them that their personal differences and abilities are valued and taken into account (Ozbebek, 2011). As a

result, management as well as the organization as a whole will be able to allocate work appropriately with regard to the differences of employees, assigning tasks based on consideration of the staff member that can best meet them (Hofstede et al., 1990). Allocation of tasks in a considerate manner in turn improves the readiness of employees to improve their performance, which contributes to the development of knowledge in the given area. Management's consideration for the different skills, needs, talents and abilities of employees motivates the employees to offer the best services they can, and makes them identify with the goals of the organization (Ozbebek 2011). As a result, employees are more likely to share knowledge regarding their unique competencies and special skills with members of other teams or departments. This culture therefore creates a better work environment for its employees. Hence, an employee-oriented culture encourages knowledge sharing behavior among employees of an organization. Thus we propose:

Proposition 21: An employee-oriented culture which cares about the well-being of its employees will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Conversely, an organization guided by a work-oriented culture pressures its employees to perform and complete the work assigned to them, regardless of whether it is at the expense of their welfare (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). In this type of culture employees do not feel that management cares about them personally, since they are treated no better than machines. Such treatment reduces employee initiative, since any personal appeal the workplace might have had for them is gone. As a result, employees are likely to simply complete the tasks they are assigned, paying little or no regard to the goals of the organization: since the workplace culture does not show regard for their welfare, there is no reason they should feel any regard for the organization's welfare (Hofstede et al., 1990).

In such a culture employees are likely to feel that their personal differences – skills, needs, talents, etc. – are not taken into account, and that the organization does not take any responsibility for the welfare of its employees, due to its emphasis on the completion of work, on time and in the expected manner (Cummings, 2004). Considering that behavior development is primarily an individual effort and not a task that can be assigned, employees are likely to dedicate their time to completing their assigned tasks rather than developing other behaviors encouraged by management, including knowledge development and knowledge sharing, both of which are person-initiated (Thomas & Velthouse 1990). Employees' capacity to share knowledge is suppressed, and their capacity to develop new knowledge is not cultivated due to the organization's limited regard for employee input in the development of plans of action (Cummings, 2004). Therefore, we suggest that employees in a work-oriented culture will be unwilling to share their knowledge with their colleagues as they don't see any benefit to doing so.

Proposition 22: A work-oriented culture which doesn't care about the well-being of its employees will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Degree of Acceptance of Leadership Style

According to Carmeli et al. (2011), leadership can enhance or hinder employees' willingness to share knowledge. Degree of acceptance of leadership refers to the degree to which an employee's direct supervisor is congruent with the employee's preferences (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). According to the results of a study conducted by Cheong et al. (2012), empowering leadership positively affects knowledge sharing behavior of employees. Srivastava et al. (2006) pointed out that knowledge sharing doesn't happen automatically; instead, it comes with the guidance and the directions of the leader. Cheong et al., (2012) found that employees may not share knowledge with their co-workers if they have a specific area of expertise. Some of

the reasons pointed out in the literature include concerns about job security and fear of losing authority (Bartol et al., 2009). Leaders therefore play a significant role in overcoming this resistance to sharing knowledge among employees. For example, leaders and decision maker within the organization can regulate policies and guidelines of cooperation and structure to ease and encourage the process of knowledge sharing between employees.

According to Yang (2007), the mentor and facilitator leadership roles contribute to knowledge sharing among employees. Leaders who are mentoring employees can guide them during the process and advise them how of the best ways to go about sharing knowledge with their colleagues. For example, consider a leader who coaches or teaches team members how to communicate effectively and encourages them to solve problems in a collaborative manner; this creates opportunities for the employees to share knowledge with each other (Xue et al., 2011). According to Hofstede (2010), leadership style plays an important role in organizational generally and in shaping employees behaviour specifically. In addition, the voluntary acceptance of a leader by employees creates a better organizational culture (Hofstede, 2010). For example, an employee who willingly accepts his or her manager's leadership is more likely to be successful and also more likely to want to engage in knowledge sharing behaviors (Carmeli et al., 2011). Thus, our propositions are:

Proposition 23: A culture in which employees are comfortable with the leadership style followed in the organization will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 24: Cultures in which employees are not comfortable with the leadership style followed in the organization will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

Degree of Identification with the Organization

Mael and Ashforth (1992, p. 104) defined organizational identification as “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) of which he or she is a member.’. According to Hofstede et al. (2010), this dimension refers to the degree of the employee's identification with the organization as a whole and to this sense of belonging. Some employees may connect with several aspects of the organization, while other employees may find nothing with which they can identify (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede & Waisfisz, 2010). Dukerich et al. (2002) pointed out that researchers have paid a great deal of attention to identity and identification at a theoretical level, but only a few studies have examined their effects empirically.

Dukerich et al. (2002) also pointed out that examining organizational identification at an empirical level may help researchers understand what makes some members of an organization engage in cooperative behavior while others do not. Patchen (1970) pointed out three components of employee identification with an organization: (1) feelings of solidarity with the organization; (2) support of the organization; and (3) perception of shared characteristics with other organizational members.” A feeling of solidarity with the organization refers to a sense of belongingness, when employees feel that they are part of the group. Support of the organization refers to those attitudes and behaviors which strengthen an employee's association with the organization. Perception of shared characteristics refers to the cognitive process by which employees notice similarities between themselves and their co-workers. From another perspective, Albert and Whetten (1985) identified three characteristics of organizations with a strong identity. These are (1) dominant attributes of the organization as perceived by employees; (2) features that make the organization unique and distinctive, and which make its employees see it differently from other organizations; and (3) employee observations about what is continuing or lasting in the organization, irrespective of what objective changes may happen in the organizational environment.

Many scholars have pointed out that organizational identification has an impact on interpersonal behaviors such as organizational citizenship behaviors and cooperative behaviors (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Dutton et al., 1994; Dukerich et al., 2002; Carmeli et al., 2011). Foote (1951) argues that if employees develop a strong identification with the organization, they are more likely to make an effort to assist the organization as a whole, beyond the explicit requirements of their task, job or position. These efforts may include such collaborative behaviors as knowledge sharing. Therefore, the more closely employees identify with the organization, the more likely they will be willing to share their knowledge with their co-workers.

Therefore, we propose the following:

Proposition 25: When employees are able to identify with some aspects of the organization and feel a sense of belonging, this will positively affect knowledge sharing.

Proposition 26: When employees are not able to identify with any aspects of the organization and do not feel a sense of belonging, this will negatively affect knowledge sharing.

The foregoing discussion can be encapsulated based on how each organizational culture dimension inculcates knowledge sharing behavior, depending on where the organization falls on the eight different cultural dimensions (see Figure 2). Several implications can also be inferred based on the propositions which are discussed below.

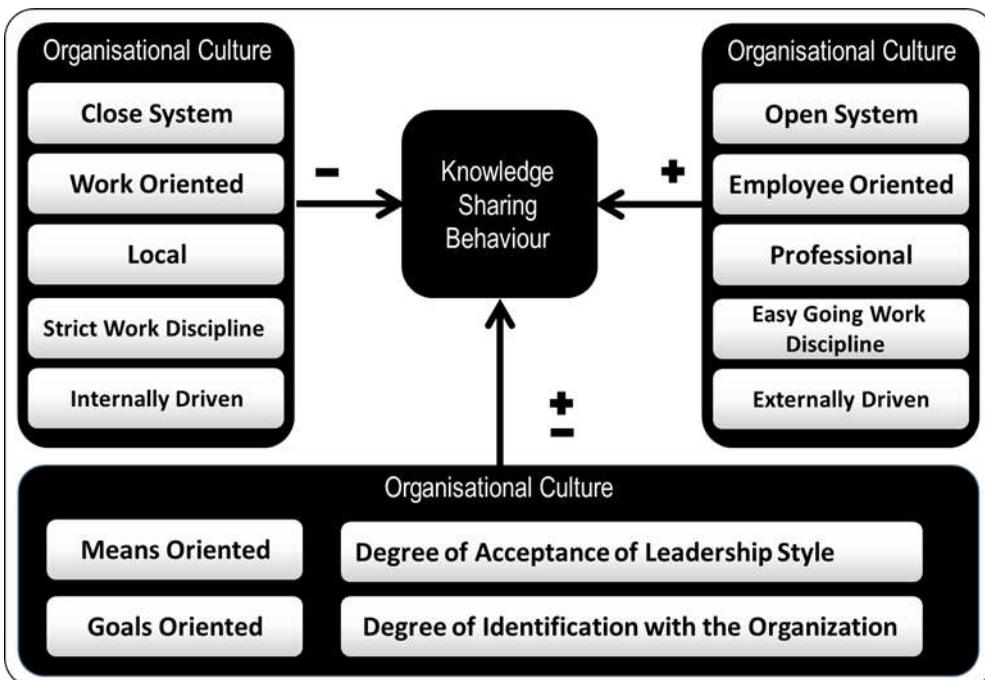


Figure 2: Identifying the Relationships between Hofstede’s Organizational Culture Dimensions and Knowledge Sharing Behavior in Organizations

Implications: Practical and Theoretical

In this section we discuss the implications of the impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing behaviors in organizations, from both a practical and theoretical perspective.

Practical Implications

It is essential that organizations develop effective strategies and solutions to ensure a congruent organizational culture that promotes knowledge sharing behaviors. By using the varied cultural dimensions as introduced by Hofstede and Waisfisz (2010), organizations are able to re-examine their existing organisational culture and thus determine and understand if their organisational culture hinders or promotes knowledge sharing behaviour among employees. From an organizational perspective, knowledge sharing (KS) behavior is expected to promote and enhance all strategic knowledge management initiatives in organizations. Consequently, strong knowledge management (KM) is an organizational asset that helps organizations compete in today's global business environment. The growing complexity of modern business requires new business processes to deliver the right information at the right time in order to ensure accountability and reduce the chance of mistakes. Hence, efficiency and effectiveness in managing organizational resources, including ideas and concepts, contributes heavily to the creation of new knowledge or ideas and the sharing of that knowledge. Organizations must therefore realize that KM is an interactive process, in which there is a free interchange of information aimed at improving and/or creating organizational competencies and strategic planning. For example, KM has been identified as significant in the decision making process since effective KM provides decision makers with the right information at the right time, thus reducing the chance of poor or ill-informed decisions. KM also plays a role in connecting people through the sharing of knowledge in order to better align business activities with organizational goals.

One common cause of poor KM is a lack of managerial support. KM is directly related to management of the organization, especially where managers are key decision makers. Most KM failures can be at least partially attributed to arrogant and non-visionary leaders who refuse to take advice from others or who are not ready to be risk takers. Management should lead by example in practicing and supporting knowledge sharing and recognizing their employees' efforts (Bantel & Jackson, 1989). This serves as a motivation factor for employees to enhance their willingness to implement and advance knowledge sharing, hence benefiting the company. From an internal perspective, KM must be considered continual and progressive in an organization, compared to external factors which are uncontrollable and volatile. However, external forces can cause a failure of KS behavior among employees.

Theoretical Implications

This study's review of the literature suggests that there are some inconsistencies in the findings regarding the impact of organizational culture on KS. Although many studies have stressed the positive impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing (Arling & Chun, 2011; Gagné, 2009; Hansen et al., 1999; Huysman & Wulf, 2006; Lin, 2007; Reyhav & Weisberg, 2010; Su et al., 2010; Tohidinia & Mosakhani, 2009), one study (Yang and Chen, 2007) argued that organizational culture does not have a significant impact on knowledge sharing. Therefore, in order to confirm whether organizational culture has a strong or weak impact on knowledge sharing more studies need to be conducted.

In this study we used as our cultural theory the latest version of Hofstede and Waisfisz (2010), which is comprised of eight (8) organizational cultural dimensions. However, it can be argued that other classic cultural theoretical frameworks, such as those of Edward Hall (1976), Fons Trompenaars (1994-2012), are equally important, because there is almost no literature that links these other cultural dimensions from with knowledge sharing behaviors. From our application of Hofstede's dimensions, however, it is assumed that knowledge sharing works best in a group context, or where there is a collaborative culture within an organization. In contrast, individualism and uneven power structures within an organization hinder knowledge sharing. From this understanding, organizations which seek to increase knowledge sharing would be wise

to encourage a team environment to allow and encourage employees to freely exchange information among them and work in a collaborative group environment. However, more studies should be done to confirm this assumption so that, by using a cultural lens to understand KS behavior, we can develop a model and/or framework that takes into account the degree of cultural influence.

An additional gap noted in the study conducted by Yang and Chen (2007) is that other cultural factors might be interacting with the knowledge sharing behavior, such as national culture. Therefore, another area for future investigation would be to explore the impact of national culture on knowledge sharing within organizations. In particular, the previous literature has pointed out a lack of studies on the impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing in Middle Eastern cultures; this would be another fertile area for future research. Since Middle Eastern culture is distinct in terms of its cultural values, attitudes, practices and procedures, the theoretical implications of such studies would allow researchers to extend its understanding of the phenomenon of KS in light of other research contexts, and expand the theoretical model to other fields such as cross-cultural management and international management.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while some previous studies have stressed the positive impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing (Arling & Chun, 2011; Gagné, 2009; Hansen, Nohria & Tienery, 1999; Huysman & Wulf, 2006; Lin, 2007; Reyhane & Weisberg, 2010; Su, Li & Chow, 2010; Tohidinia & Mosakhani, 2009), other studies have shown a contradictory relationship. In particular, Yang and Chen (2007) reported that organizational culture did not have a significant impact on knowledge sharing. Thus, further study is needed to resolve this discrepancy. Given such inconsistencies in the past literature, the main aim of this paper is to explore the impact of organizational culture on knowledge sharing behavior in organizations and to suggest what types of organizational culture best promote knowledge sharing behavior. In addition, it aims to investigate the dimensions of organizational culture that foster or hinder knowledge sharing. More study is needed to establish which cultural dimension exerts the greatest impact on knowledge sharing, as little has been proven about the relative efficacy of different cultural dimensions. However, from Hofstede's work it is likely that knowledge sharing works best in a group context, or where there is a collaborative culture within the organization. In contrast, elements of individualism and uneven power structures within the organization hinder knowledge sharing. In a nutshell, organizations that seek to increase knowledge sharing are advised to encourage a team-oriented working environment, but more empirical studies are needed to test the abovementioned propositions as presented in this paper.

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